DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 142 CS 006 563

AUTHOR Blass, Rosanne J.
TITLE Nurturing the Roots of Literacy.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; Child Development; *Child Language; Classroom Techniques; *Language Acquisition; *Language Processing; *Learning Activities; Literacy Education; *Metacognition; Oral Language; Primary Education; Reading Instruction; Reading Processes; Written Language
IDENTIFIERS Reading Writing Relationship

ABSTRACT

Reflecting the work of Yetta Goodman on child language development, this paper examines Goodman's five "roots of literacy" and offers suggestions on classroom techniques for nurturing these roots. The first half of the paper explains how Goodman identified the roots of literacy and describes each of them, including (1) print awareness in situational context, (2) print awareness in connected discourse, (3) functions and forms of print, (4) use of oral language to talk about written language, and (5) metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language. The second half of the paper describes learning activities that teachers may use to nurture the child's developing roots of literacy and to facilitate the development of cognitive clarity, which seems to be a prerequisite for successful reading. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED214142

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

NURTURING THE ROOTS OF LITERACY

Dr. Rosanne J. Blass, Coordinator
Allegheny College Instruction Center
The Alcazar
Surrey & Derbyshire
Cleveland Heights, Chio 44106

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Rosanne J. Blass

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS006563

NURTURING THE ROOTS OF LITERACY

The impact of linguistics in the mid 1960's resulted in the birth of psycholinguistics which established a major trend in reading and language arts research throughout the 1970's. Investigations of language usage, language comprehension, language acquisition, and the relationship between language development and reading behavior focused attention to reading as a natural language communication process. Studies of the beginning reader indicated that the child seems to follow a progression of steps toward cognitive clarity that leads to effective use of phonics, rules, and decoding skills (Fryer, 1976; Price, 1976; Forester, 1977; Downing, 1977).

Based upon the research of the 1970's, Goodman (1980) extended Vygotsky's (1962) metaphoe "Roots of Language" from oral to written language. Vygotsky (1962) originally postulated the notion of language deriving from the separate roots of thought and speech. Goodman (1980) postulated the notion of literacy deriving from the separate roots of oral and written language. She identified what she called the "Roots of Literacy" which must develop within the successful reader. Those Roots of Literacy are the development of: 1) print awareness in situational contexts; 2) print awareness in connected discourse; 3) functions and forms of print; 4) use of oral language to talk about written language; 5) metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss Goodman's (1980) Roots of Literacy and to provide classroom suggestions for the nurturing of those roots.

ROOTS OF LITERACY

Print awareness in situational contexts. Goodman's (1980) term "print awareness in situational contexts" is synonymous with Frank Smith's (1979) term "environmental print". Awareness of print in situational contexts, or awareness of environmental print, functions much like spoken language in that it is intimately related to the situation in which it occurs. TV captions and commercials; names on products at the supermarket or in the kitchen cupboard; signs in streets, stores, or shopping malls operate in the child's immediate world to deliver a message. The child can derive the meaning of environmental print as he can derive the meaning of spoken language from the situation in which it occurs.

Print awareness in connected discourse. In contrast to print awareness in situational contexts, print awareness in connected discourse, or printed text (Smith, 1979), tends to be abstract in that it refers to situations remote in time and space. Printed text which is the language of stories, magazines, and newspapers is not directly related to the situation in which it occurs. A significant person must bring these materials into the environment and experience of the child. Unlike environmental print, the meaning of which the child can derive from the situation, printed text requires interaction with a significant person who transmits textual meaning to the child.

Functions and form of print. While printed language can serve to control and regulate behavior, its most important function is to communicate a message. Children become sensitized to the communicative function

of print by interacting with its occurrence in their own environments. The form of printed language includes directionality as well as distinctive shapes, colors, sizes and pictorial cues. Through their personal experiences children discover that printed language occurs in predictable places and that printed language forms are embedded in the environmental setting.

Use of oral language to talk about written language. Talking and thinking about written language occurs as a direct response to active involvement with print in the environment. Talking about written language is the means through which the child assimilates new information, accommodates the new with the old, and achieves equilibrium or mastery of the new. It is through talking about written language that the child acquires conscious awareness of and control over the function and form of written language.

Metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language. Metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness refers to the ability to understand the concepts and to use terminology such as word, story, spaces, letters, sentence, etc. for the analysis of written language. Through their experiences with environmental print and printed text plus the opportunity to talk about those experiences, children acquire conscious awareness of how written language works.

Summary. Interaction with environmental print, printed text, awareness of the communicative function and forms of print, and the opportunity to talk about written language culminate in the understanding and use

of terminology which allows for analysis of written language and conscious awareness of how language works. Smith (1976), Ylisto (1977), Vygotsky (1978) and Goodman (1980) provide evidence of children responding to environmental print from the age of 3 years. Their studies indicate that the roots of literacy develop concurrently and culminate with the attainment of metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness at about the age of 4 to 8 years. Metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness seem to correspond with Downing's (1977) "cognitive clarity" which seems to be attained at about the time the child makes the transition from Piaget's preoperational to concrete stage of functioning.

NURTURING THE ROOTS OF LITERACY

Classroom teachers can expect that children who are the products of a literate society and a literate environment will enter kindergarten and first grade with some awareness of the function and form of environmental print. Some, but not all, children will be familiar with the function and form of printed text. Many children will be unclear as to the tasks, terminology, use and purpose of reading. They will be limited in their ability to segment and manipulate language components. Teachers can expect that most beginning readers will function in a state of "cognitive confusion" regarding the components of language (Downing,1977).

While initiating instruction in reading readiness and beginning reading skills, the classroom teacher may wish to incorporate some of the following learning activities that nurture the child's developing roots of literacy and facilitate the development of cognitive clarity which seems to be a prerequisite for successful reading.

Print awareness in situational contexts. Develop awareness of print in situational contexts through labeling, writing simple directions and messages, and by taking advantage of the opportunities that occur naturally during daily activities.

Make temporary labels for the classroom. For example, make labels to insure the return of materials and tools to proper places; a sign to keep children out of a recently built block structure; or labels for bulletin boards and interest centers. Direct your students' attention to the labels several times during the day, and read the labels aloud to them.

In addition to the common practice of posting the names of room helpers, the day, weather, class schedule, and classroom rules and regulations, use print to give simple directions. For example, tell the children that you have listed their names in groups and that one group at a time is to line up for the bus or to go to the lavatory, library, lunchroom, or playground. Post the list so that the children get their directions from print. If you are reading the names for classes of non-readers, point to each name as you say it.

Take advantage of the opportunities that grow naturally out of the daily classroom activity. For example, read aloud the lunchroom menu each day then post it on the bulletin board. Attendance and the daily milk or lunch count can also be posted. To stimulate children's awareness of environmental print, direct attention to signs along the road, on buildings, in vacant lots, and on shops when taking field trips or walking around the school. Discuss the meaning and value of the signs.

Print awareness in connected discourse. Bridge the gap between time and space by capitalizing on the many opportunities that occur during the day to make records and write messages to communicate with others who are not present. For example, kindergarten children in one school voted on a name for their classroom pet. A display of the voting procedure was placed in the hall with a short narrative explaining the charted record. When writing notes to send home with children, tell them what is being communicated and why the note serves the purpose.

Tell the children that they will have a chance to be authors. Encourage them to predict story text from pictures. Pause when reading to the group and ask what is probably going to happen next, then what is possible to happen. Accept all predictions, writing those of young children and allowing time for older children to write their own. When their text is read along with the printed text in the book, point out for discussion the fact that the written language is communication from the author to the reader.

Let children dictate verses, rhymes, and jingles that they know and use for jumping rope, counting, games. Encourage the pupils to read from the charts and to illustrate the activities.

Help children read paragraphs that have been prepared as cloze exercises, i.e.: those in which every fifth word has been deleted and a blank line substituted for the deleted word. Remind them that their word insertions must make sense.

When a child stumbles over a word in print, ask: "What do you think the word might be? What would make sense?" Remind children often that reading must make sense.

Functions and forms of print. To develop awareness of written language as communication, fill bulletin boards with children's writing. Use, for example, both magazine pictures and pupil drawings, labeled as directed by the children; single sentence, signed by the writers; favorite words that have been invorporated into sentences; verses, either original or copied. Read the messages with the children. Explain that by means of the printed language in these pieces, each author (a member of the group) has been able to communicate with readers (other classmates). Update the display often.

To develop the notion that some written language carries authority, read aloud a message from the office that states definite procedures to be followed. Post on the bulletin board. Class composed procedures for field trips, welcoming visitors, school conduct, and housekeeping may be posted as well.

Encourage the use of "scribble" writing for those not yet able to write. Spread large paper on the floor or the tables. Let the children scribble "the words" with crayons or large pencils as they sing or listen to nursery shymes.

Tell the children that they are going to pretend that they can write the story you dictate to them. Demonstrate the procedure at the chalkboard. As you say, "The boy hit the ball," make a scribble to represent each word you pronounce. Ask the children to write each sentence on a separate line. Dictate each sentence twice. Let the children "read" the sentences back to you, pointing to their "words" as they read.

Use of oral language to talk about written language. Involve your students with print and encourage them to talk about their experiences. Provide easy access to pencils, crayons, paint, and paper. Encourage scribbling, drawing, writing names. Allow time for listening to children's interpretations of their endeavors. Arrange for selected pieces to be used for items for communication with others.

Talk about the reason for writing names in boots or other articles of clothing. Each time a lost article is returned to a child, direct attention to the label and the way it was of help in identifying the owner.

Before fastening name tags on children, discuss their function so that each child understands the reason for wearing a tag.

Involve the children in writing for their personal needs. For example, compose notes to send to the office or the teacher next door; write invitations to classroom programs; write birthday, get-well, and congratulatory messages to classmates and family members. Talk about the messages and the task of writing the messages.

Metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language. Develop metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness through language experience activities which show children that written language is communicative and expressive. Dictating stories, children perceive clearly the reason why as well as the way in which an author writes. When reading these stories, they have no doubts that written language tells the reader something.

In addition, the language experience approach provides excellent opportunities for developing concepts and use of terminology such as "sentence", "word", and "writing". Recognizing children's problems in developing these concepts, you will want to use the terms naturally and consistently in incidental conversations that accompany writing language experience stories. Language experience allows children to observe how words progress from oral language to print; the use of space between words, punctuation, and upper and lower case letters; and conventions such as reading from left-to-right, top-to-bottom, one line at a time.

Conclusion. Immersing young children in an environment rich in written language, providing opportunities for them to interact with print and to talk about those experiences with print may serve to nurture the roots of literacy and to facilitate the young reader's transition from cognitive confusion to cognitive clarity.

REFERENCES

Downing, John. "Linguistics for Infants." Reading. UKRA July 1977, pp.36-45.

Forester, Anne D. "What Teachers Can Learn from Natural Readers." The Reading Teacher. November, 1977, pp.160-166.

Fryer, Jeanne. "No, I Can't Read: What Children Think About Reading." Fortieth Yearbook. Claremont Reading Conference. Claremont, Ca. (1976) pp. 135-141.

Goodman, Yetta. "The Roots of Literacy". Forty-Fourth Yearbook. Claremont Reading Conference. Claremont, Ca. (1980). pp.1-32.

Price, Eunice H. "How Thirty-Seven Gifted Children Learned to Read." The Reading Teacher. October, 1976. pp. 44-48.

Smith, Frank. "Learning to Read by Reading." Language Arts. 53 (1976) 197-299, 322.

Smith, Frank. Reading Without Nonsense. New York: Teachers College Press, 52 (1979).

Vygotsky, L.S. Thought and Language. M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1962.

Vygotsky, L.S. Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1978.

Ylisto, Ingrid P. "Early Reading Responses of Young Finnish Children." The Reading Teacher. November 1977, pp. 167-172.